



*from his Father*  
*Not dup. 2*

**T W O**

**DISCOURSES**

**PREACHED TO THE**

**FIRST PARISH IN KENNEBUNK,**

**OCTOBER 21, 1838.**

**BY GEORGE W. WELLS.**



**KENNEBUNK :**

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**1839.** *e*

AT a meeting of the Members of the First Parish in Kennebunk, on Monday the 15th day of October, 1838:

*Voted*, that GEORGE LORD, JOHN ROSS and GEORGE W. BOURNE be a Committee to wait on the Rev. GEORGE W. WELLS, with the thanks of the Parish for his appropriate Sermons delivered yesterday, and request copies of the same for the press.

*Attest*, DANIEL SEWALL, *Clerk.*

## DISCOURSE I.

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ACTS XX. 27.

FOR I HAVE NOT SHUNNED TO DECLARE UNTO YOU ALL THE COUNSEL  
OF GOD.

THIS day concludes eleven years of my ministry among you, and, through circumstances beyond human control, it having become necessary that I should leave you, it concludes the term of that ministry. For a long time I have felt that my state of health has prevented me from fulfilling my duties among you as a minister's duties ought to be fulfilled, and as you had a right to expect they would be. And although, through your kindness, much indulgence has been extended toward me, and you have not objected to, but rather urged, my frequent and long absences from this scene of my labors, and although when here, you have not required of me that close and unremitting attention to duty which the office of a minister demands, still I have not felt that it was right for me to continue *thus* to serve you, nor just to your spiritual interests that the duties of your minister should be thus performed. And I have thence been led to request of you a dismissal from my office as your pastor and religious teacher; a request with which you have complied in a manner very deeply affecting to me.

Under the circumstances of the present occasion I am led to take a review of the doctrines which I have preached dur-

ing my ministry among you. For the manner in which I have unfolded to you the religion of Jesus Christ, am I accountable to my God. And you also are accountable to Him for the effect which the doctrines of that religion have had upon your hearts. May we all conduct this examination with a careful regard to our own responsibility to Him, who has taught us the Truth for our sanctification, and who will certainly condemn us if we have wilfully perverted that truth, or held it in unrighteousness.

We may consider the doctrines of christianity under three general divisions ; viz. those which relate to the character and government of God, to the nature, duty and destiny of man, and to the character and offices of Jesus Christ. While I have been among you, it has been my aim to give you just, impressive, practical views upon the great truths of the Bible relative to these deeply interesting topics. I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God, so far as I have known it. I have revealed to you the *character* of God. While I have placed Him before you as a Being of Infinite Holiness, who 'loveth righteousness,' and in whose sight all sin is hateful, I have sought most earnestly to lead you to regard him as a Father. With all the feelings of affectionate interest with which an earthly parent looks upon his children does God look upon us. No love which one human being bears to another can equal the love which he bears toward us. He hath manifested it in the rich provisions of nature, in the wise arrangements of providence, in the vast system of means which his mercy is employing for the recovery and redemption of the sinner. He supplies with a liberal hand the wants of the helpless, He looks with an eye of love upon the sorrows of the distressed, and with earnest pity does He seek to save that which is lost. And the whole moral government of God is based upon his paternal relation to man. His commands are strict, searching, thorough, requiring the supreme sway of conscience over every thought,

feeling and affection; and yet they are so many directions how we may attain the highest dignity and happiness of our natures. His prohibitions are stern and uncompromising, rising up in the sinner's path like a wall of fire, and demanding in tones of thunder his return to virtue; and yet they are so many warnings that his children may learn to avoid the deepest curse of which the human soul is capable. In all ways and by all means is God thus seeking to promote the highest welfare of man. He has ever for his highest purpose the perfection and bliss of our own souls. Have you received these truths into cold and careless hearts, and acknowledging them to be truths, have you become no more devoted to the service of your Father? Have you heard them proclaimed, Sabbath after Sabbath, and have they failed to lead you in humble gratitude to the love and obedience of your best Friend? What words can express the danger of that soul which has acquired the fatal power of resisting the holiest influences of the Divine Spirit? May you awake to that danger, ere it be too late.

I have preached to you the nature, the duty and the destiny of man. His nature I have represented as a noble nature. He is the child of God, formed in his image, capable of sharing in some humble measure in his holiness and happiness. I have taught you to feel that God had endowed you with all the divine faculties of immortal, spiritual beings, and made you capable of becoming "followers of Him as dear children." As for that doctrine that the nature of man is depraved, I have no belief in it, but, on the contrary, a deep abhorrence of it. Of all the doctrines which the ingenuity of man ever devised, that appears to me one of the most dreadful; darkening the prospects and hopes of the human soul, derogatory to the divine character, and tending to diminish human responsibility by casting the blame of its sins, off from the soul, upon its Creator. That doctrine, I thank my God, I have never believed, and never preached.

Human Depravity I believe in, but not a depravity natural to man, not born in him, not the necessary result of the exercise of his powers, but the result of his own abuse and perversion of his noble faculties, and of his voluntary departure from the peaceful paths of virtue. Human Depravity who can help believing? Who is ignorant of its alarming prevalence? Who is blind to the misery which it brings with it and after it? Who does not know that it is the one prolific source of all the wretchedness of man? It is to counteract this exceeding depravity that I have presented to you higher and nobler views of human nature, for I knew that, if you received them into honest hearts, they would make you feel a deeper responsibility for whatever sins you commit, and that you would feel that it were as wise to maim your bodies, or mar your intellectual faculties, as to dim the purity of that spirit which the Infinite Father had breathed into you. I have sought to lead you to a deep reverence of your own natures, so that you might not degrade yourselves to be the mere slaves of this world, while the spiritual world is open before you and all its infinite joys are placed within your reach. And I put it now to your consciences whether you have permitted these views to produce their natural and legitimate effect upon your hearts and lives.

Founded upon these views of human nature and of the character and government of God, I have preached a system of human duty at once the most spiritual and the most thoroughly practical. I have endeavored to explain and urge upon your attention *regeneration*, not as an abstract doctrine, not as a subject of controversy, not as a curious matter of speculation, but as the all-embracing, all-important *DUTY* of every human being. Regeneration I have shown to be the unfolding of the spiritual powers of the human soul, and the application of its divine affections and faculties to their appropriate objects. Man, the child of God, is unjust to his own nature, if he do not recognise the high relation which he

sustains to his Heavenly Father, and labour most earnestly to fulfil the duties which spring from that relation. Jesus came that he might awaken within the human soul this spiritual life, and until the minister of Jesus succeeds in leading his people to a perception of its transcendent importance, he has not fulfilled his appropriate work, although he may have incessantly and successfully urged the formation of good habits of life, and enjoined the utmost strictness of outward conduct. When man attains a deep conviction that he is a child of God and has formed his views of life and duty upon this conviction, and his true LIFE has begun, the natural result will be a life of christian virtue. Does he feel that he is the child of God? Then will he trust in his Father's wisdom, submit to his disposal, rejoice to do his will. Then no cloud of sorrow can overshadow him upon which his eye of faith does not discern the bright bow of promise. No temptation can arise in which he does not hear a call to resolute resistance, and find an opportunity of attaining more power over himself. From all his intercourse with human society, from every event of life, joyous or grievous, from every scene in nature, do his spiritual faculties derive strength, for he feels that they all were designed to assist him in becoming a follower of God as his dear child. With these views, too, man looks with a very different eye upon his fellow-man. Underneath the most loathsome misery and the darkest depravity he sees his Father's image in the soul, and sympathises with all its struggles to release itself from its bondage; and rejoices to assist it in rising to the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Poverty never excites his contempt, never meets from him a cold neglect, for he has learned to reverence human nature too much to slight it because it wears a mean garb. Sin never excites his ridicule, for sin is, in his view, the sad ruin of a noble nature, and awakens in him the tenderest compassion. And therefore he labors with a brother's love and a christian zeal to redeem and elevate his



fellow men. And thus it is, that from this one great duty of regeneration will spring that supreme love of God and that disinterested love of man which Jesus enjoins. I have likewise taught what I believe the word of God teaches with regard to the destiny of man. That, under the righteous government of God, virtue will not go unrewarded nor sin unpunished. To those who seek to love and serve their God the blessedness of heaven will be given; a blessedness infinite in its duration, ever increasing in its joys. This happiness of Heaven I have represented to you as resulting from the very character of the soul itself, filled with love of holiness, and glowing with gratitude toward its God and its Saviour. Heaven begins therefore upon earth in the christian soul, and, when this corruptible hath put on incorruption and this mortal immortality, that soul will be pressing on toward the perfection and bliss for which it was created. Death will introduce it into new scenes, higher privileges, and its bliss will ever be commensurate, through the infinite mercy of God, to its fidelity to itself and its Creator. The kingdom of heaven, said Jesus, is within you. Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. I have not shunned, also, to declare unto you my deep and firm conviction, that those over whose hearts religion does not bear sway, cannot be happy: that they carry a hell within them: and that death, separating them, as it must, from all the engrossing employments of the world, from all those means whereby they seek to silence the reproaches of conscience, and leaving them alone to themselves and their God, must heighten into intensity the misery which they have been laying up for themselves. The sinner, I believe, lifts a suicidal hand against his own soul, is self-sacrificed, self-destroyed by the sins in which he voluntarily indulges. Knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord I have endeavoured to persuade you to turn from all your evil ways and save your souls from the SECOND DEATH.

With regard to the character and offices of Jesus Christ, I

have represented him, as he is set forth in the Scriptures, as the *son* of God, inferior to, and dependant upon, the Father, by whom he was sanctified and sent into the world, receiving his power, his wisdom, his authority from his Father. He came into the world that he might bring about a reconciliation between God and man, not by changing the disposition of God, but by changing the character and disposition of man, leading him to understand his relation to God, awakening him to repentance, persuading and assisting him to fulfil the duties which he owes to his God and his fellow-men. The doctrine of the atonement, I have represented as one and the same thing with this reconciliation. I have taught that we receive the atonement whenever we are led by faith in Jesus Christ to turn unto the Lord our God, and to serve him as our rightful sovereign and ruler. This atonement, I have taught, is effected by the character and life of Jesus, in which he exemplified the beauty of holiness; by his instructions, in which he made known to us the disposition and purposes of God, the nature and destiny of man; and especially by his death, revealing the infinite depth of his own love to man, and kindling a love like his own in the hearts of men, and thus leading the soul in penitence and holy resolution back to its forsaken God. The Saviour's CROSS I have not failed to hold up before you as the great means of human redemption, virtue and happiness. Thousands have yielded to the power of that cross, who have resisted all other influences, and hardened themselves against all other impressions.

These doctrines, and others of minor importance, which time prevents me from enumerating now, have I, in the course of my ministry, preached to you. I have endeavored to preach them, not by way of controversy, but as deeply solemn and practical truths. I have believed that these truths lay at the foundation of the gospel, so that they are true sources of the most exalted virtue and piety. If I have

failed to present them in a clear, distinct light to any of your minds, and if, through my negligence, any of you are still in darkness as to the sublime doctrines of the gospel, I pray for the forgiveness of Him before whom I shall soon stand to give an account of my stewardship. If any have received these glorious truths into their understandings, and their hearts have been still cold and dead, I entreat them to remember that the clearer one's views of truth and duty are, the deeper is his responsibility to God, and the sadder will be his lot if he be unfaithful to his solemn trust. If, in the course of my ministry, and by means of it, any have received these truths into honest and good hearts, and have brought forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness, I desire to thank my God that he has made my labors instrumental in these blessed results. And though, in that respect, I have not the satisfaction which I might wish, I believe that I may cherish the glorious hope, that there are some on earth, and others now in Heaven, who have felt the saving power of the truths which they have here heard, and have been brought by them to happiness and God.

## DISCOURSE II.

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### ACTS XX. 32.

AND NOW, BRETHREN, I COMMEND YOU TO GOD AND TO THE WORD OF HIS GRACE, WHICH IS ABLE TO BUILD YOU UP AND TO GIVE YOU AN INHERITANCE AMONG ALL THEM WHICH ARE SANCTIFIED.

IN my discourse this morning I took a brief review of the doctrines which I had endeavored to maintain and inculcate during the term of my ministry among you. I have never seen reason to regret that these doctrines have been preached by me. And if I could only look back upon the whole of my ministry with as much satisfaction as upon this part of it, I should be contented. For these doctrines I regard as the truths of the gospel, revealed by God for the growth of his children in Christian holiness, and I know, from what it has been my privilege to witness of the results of them upon many a heart among you, that they constitute the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth them. I only regret that they have not been advocated with more power, and enforced with greater earnestness. The doctrines themselves I rejoice in. Living, I would cherish them, and do what in me lies to defend and spread them. Dying, I would have them for the support of my soul in the hour of its extremest need. I pray that they may pervade human society and accomplish the divine purpose for which the blessed Teacher gave them to the world.

In taking my leave of you, you will permit me to say a few words by way of parting counsel.

And, in the first place, I would enjoin upon you a firm, earnest, open avowal of the doctrines which you have embraced. After having used all means within your reach for the attainment of just views of religion, do not shrink from any reproaches which the avowal of them may bring upon you. Do not fear being called by hard names by those who do not understand, and who may not appreciate them as you do. Time was, and that not long ago, when there was too much of a controversial spirit among those called Unitarians, and they chiefly needed to be warned of those evils which result from contention with their fellow christians. They were constantly called upon to defend their faith, and they were in great danger of degrading the sacred cause of christianity by the introduction of a narrow party spirit and a mere sectarian zeal. That danger, among us at least, has given place to one of a different kind, although no less fatal to character. Our present danger lies in an overweening anxiety for the good opinion of other denominations. To gain that good opinion we are naturally anxious. Cast out, in time past, from the possession even of the christian name, charged, so generally as we were, with denying that Saviour whom it is our delight to honor, it is not unnatural that we should meet with great satisfaction any disposition on the part of other christians to receive us on a different ground. And perhaps, for the purpose of securing their good opinion, we may have sometimes tried to make it appear that the difference between our opinions and theirs was less than it really is. We may have been willing to have it supposed that we agree with them as to doctrines and measures to a greater extent than we actually do. Let me then exhort you never to swerve from a frank, honest avowal of your own religious opinions. You owe this to yourselves; for it is degrading to any man's character to let the fear or the favor of the world

turn him aside from honesty. You owe it to the truth you believe, if it have in any degree enlightened your minds or purified your hearts ; that you give it your firm support through evil report as well as through good report. You owe it to your God and your Saviour, that you be not ashamed of their words. Do not be anxiously inquiring how this or that measure may please our neighbors of a different denomination, or what they will think of this or that doctrine. But ask,—Is that measure calculated to promote our own spiritual improvement ? Is that doctrine the truth of God ? Independence in the adoption and expression of our opinions is what we much need, and are bound most jealously to preserve : independence of every influence which may be exerted by our own or any other denomination. Every man is bound to enthrone the love of truth in his heart, and he must suffer nothing to make him swerve from the honest, earnest pursuit of it. Perhaps, in the circumstances in which you are about to be placed, this advice may not be needless. It would not be strange, if, when you are destitute of a pastor, others should take advantage of your situation, to persuade you away from your accustomed place of worship, and to act upon your minds by other influences than the simple influence of truth. If you should be exposed to such dangers, stand firm, I pray you, to your own convictions. Take heed, lest in your desire to please your fellow men, you offend against your conscience, your Saviour, your God.

Again, let me remind you that the spirit of christianity is a spirit of unwearied love, and earnest effort for the good of others. One of the chief ways by which it promotes human happiness is by awakening and giving a right direction to the benevolent affections of the soul. It sets before us as our model Jesus of Nazareth, and tells us in its simple eloquence that he went about doing good. It tells us that God employs human instrumentality in accomplishing his purposes of mercy for the race. It teaches us to consider it a noble priv-

ilege to be fellow-laborers with Him. If then christianity has exerted its celestial influence upon us, we shall eagerly embrace every opportunity to promote the temporal and spiritual welfare of our fellow-men. We shall be ready to assist with our sympathy and counsel those who may need them. We shall freely use our time, our talents, our property, whenever and wherever we can do good. We shall not be hoarding up with a miser's grasp the property, which success in business has poured into our coffers, or which laborious industry has carefully gathered. We shall feel that all we are or have belongs to God. And we shall act as faithful stewards who will ere long be called to their account. Why, my friends, what do we wish money for, if it is not to be used? And how can we better use it than for the benefit of our fellow-creatures. It will be but a miserable satisfaction to look back at the close of life and be compelled to feel that we have lived for ourselves alone and have laid up treasures on earth. Oh, if we would only bear that hour more habitually in mind, we should live for a truer purpose and a nobler end. You, my friends, have expended with a liberal hand, whenever you have been called to do any thing having a direct reference to your own spiritual improvement. Witness that valuable library, which you have gathered for your own and your children's benefit, and which has been so instrumental in elevating the taste, and spreading sound religious knowledge among the members of our beloved parish. This place of worship, too, so neat and commodious, bears witness to your liberality in what concerns your spiritual interests most directly. And if a people's kindness and liberality toward their pastor be any test of their willingness to make sacrifices for their religious interests, I am sure you have given that evidence. But have we done what we ought to have done for *others*? Have we cultivated that enlarged christian benevolence which looks beyond its own little circle of interests, and occupies itself in devising and executing plans for the spiritual

good of our fellow-men? I fear that herein we have been all too deficient. The missionary spirit, that intense burning desire to extend to others the inestimable blessings of christianity, how little of it is there among us. There are many poor, many deeply depraved, in our very midst. How little, in comparison with our means, are we doing to elevate and bless them, and to bring their hearts under the influence of gospel truth. Our fellow-christians of other denominations have their hearts set upon the sublime work of the world's conversion. And eagerly, and perseveringly, and gloriously, are they laboring in that noble cause. We do, comparatively, nothing. We may think many of their plans injudicious. We may call some of them visionary and ostentatious. We may say that there is work enough to be done, and with far better prospect of success, at home. All that may be true. But, after all, can we deny that the missionary spirit, was the very spirit of Christ? And if we do not share in his deep love to men, and in his laborious exertions and sacrifices for their good, may it not be said to us that we 'are none of his?' I feel, my friends, that while I have been among you, I have not been sufficiently earnest in persuading you to live for others rather than for yourselves. I have not been sufficiently explicit in shewing where and how you could do the most good. If I had done my duty better, you might have been more faithful to your solemn trusts. But the opportunity for me has gone. I cannot recal the past to correct its errors, or to atone for its neglects. But I would entreat each one of you to ask himself, where and how can I do any good? O, my dear friends, do not live for yourselves alone, but for Him who loved you and gave himself for you. In living for others, you live for Him; for you remember how he said, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'

Let me likewise counsel you to take more heed to the right education of the young. And by education I mean not the



mere acquisition of knowledge, but the right direction and improvement of all the faculties of the intellectual and moral nature. You do not educate your child when you merely put books into his hands, and send him to school. You educate him aright only when you watch most anxiously that right impressions be made upon his mind, just views adopted by him, and firm principles established within him. Children are left too much to the casual influences of prevailing opinions and practises. We do not feel, as deeply as we ought, with what vigilant care these young immortals should be trained up, and how carefully we should lead them to the adoption of just principles. Their inclinations are restrained, when the gratification of them would interfere with their parents' convenience or pleasure, but too seldom from a high and holy regard to their own truest interests. I cannot forbear adverting to one increasing evil which characterises the present time. There is among the young a strong disposition to resist the exercise of a wholesome parental authority, a feverish impatience of restraint, a readiness to insist upon and talk about their supposed rights, rather than to ascertain and fulfil their duties. These tendencies do not augur well for the welfare of society, and no little wisdom on the part of parents is demanded to control and correct them. It is a common but true maxim, which teaches us that we must learn to obey before we are fit to command. Is it then of no consequence whether those, who are soon to take their places as leaders of society, are imbibing sound principles, and forming right habits, or whether they have embraced false, disorganizing principles and formed corresponding habits? As members of society, anxious for its welfare, should you take heed to these things. As parents, whose hearts are deeply interested for those whose moral welfare is dearer to you than life, should you strive to keep within your children's minds a tender conscience, and to implant an internal restraint of sound principles. As responsible to God for the

precious charge which he has entrusted to you, should you sedulously strive to form their immortal minds upon the perfect model of your Saviour's character, and to train them up for glory, honor and immortality. Can you conceive a higher joy than that of meeting these dear children of yours all safe in Heaven, and knowing that it was by your virtuous example and your earnest teachings that they were fitted for that life of bliss? Can you imagine a deeper curse than the terrible consciousness that by your neglect these immortal souls were ruined, lost?

You will soon be called, my friends, to select for yourselves another pastor. And may I not give a word of advice upon that subject also? I trust that you will receive it kindly when I say to you, that there prevails frequently too fastidious a taste in the choice of a minister. People are not satisfied when they find a man filled with the spirit of his master, and willing to devote a sound, well-furnished mind to their spiritual interests. If there happens to be some slight defect in voice, or manner, or even in personal appearance, the man is, by many, at once condemned; although, probably, that defect would be forgotten as soon as you come to know the real excellencies of his intellectual and moral character. My advice then is, that you seek for your pastor a man in whom the true spirit of Jesus dwells; not a mercenary man, not a vain man, even though he has the eloquence of an angel. Be satisfied with no one unless HIS HEART IS IN HIS WORK, and then resolve to overlook or bear with any minor defects which you may find in him. Defects there will be in every one. You cannot find a faultless man. It is far better that he should be deficient in his outward manner than in his mental or spiritual qualifications. A heartless minister cannot but drag down any society which has the misfortune to be burdened with him. When you find a man of the right spirit, secure him for your own, and do not be anxious to listen to a great variety of preachers; for every man whom you

hear, will have his own friends, and thus the society will become divided in feeling and opinion. It is my earnest wish for you, my dear friends, that you may soon find one, who will be, to each one of you, a firm, faithful, personal friend and a devoted minister of Jesus Christ.

And now that I am about to leave you, it is needless for me to say with what deep regret I take my leave of this sacred place and of you my kind parishoners and friends. Seldom, in these days of uneasiness and contention, does it happen that a connection of so many years standing, is preserved with so much harmony of feeling, and so little misunderstanding. I cannot feel that this has been the result of any peculiar wisdom or care on my part, for I know that I have great reason to thank you for overlooking many deficiencies and pardoning many negligences. To most of your families have I been called to minister in seasons of sickness and bereavement. I tremble when I think that I may have frequently been unfaithful to your souls, in those seasons when the heart was most peculiarly susceptible to the impressions of religion. With most of you have I associated in seasons of gladness. But I fear that I have frequently neglected to turn the thoughts to the Source of all good then. Frequently have I met with you around the family fireside, and how many opportunities have I neglected, of giving a useful turn to the thoughts and perhaps of assisting those who were seeking a better than earthly treasure. My unfaithfulness cannot be remedied now. I pray that, in the *great day*, it may not be found that your spiritual interests have irreparably suffered in my hands.

To the younger part of my society, and especially to the children of the Sabbath School, I now bid an affectionate farewell. My heart is deeply interested for you, and never shall I forget the many happy hours which I have spent with you. I feel grateful to your Teachers, for they have been assisting me in my own work. Many of them were

children in the Sabbath School when I came here ; and they could tell you, how much of their religious knowledge and their love to God they had derived from the instructions of this school. My earnest wish for you, dear children, is that you would profit by the privileges which you enjoy. Resolve that you will spend each day of life with a true love of your Heavenly Father, and in obedience to your Saviour Jesus Christ.

My friends, farewell. I trust that I may be permitted to see you again, and that I may often hear of your prosperity and happiness, both temporal and spiritual. I am not, I earnestly hope, speaking to you, now, for the last time. I trust that I may often have the privilege of addressing you from this place. But whether present or absent, whether in health or in sickness, whether living or dying, I cannot but remember you, sympathise with you, love you still. And when the short term of life has passed, may we all be prepared to meet, where no sickness shall ever blight our hopes, and no friends ever fear separation.

